

Detached ADU Project Conclusions

What are appropriate development standards for detached ADUs that "fit" on a single-family lot and within a single-family neighborhood, but still allow the development of a livable unit?

Proposed development standards are being recommended, and follow several public process steps that have been completed, including focus groups, a public forum, and on-line outreach.

The Demonstration Project detached ADUs reviewed here indicate that flexibility should be allowed for some standards, such as setbacks, but tighter controls should be used for standards like height and total floor area. Projects which departed from traditional side- and rear-yard setbacks significantly worked just as well and in some cases better than others, particularly with shorter overall heights.

Two major themes emerged in the review of these projects that will most directly feed into proposed detached ADU provisions: new dwellings that are well-designed and fit into their surroundings from both a design and size/open space point of view will be more successful. A streamlined administrative design review process and some variation of maximum allowed floor-to-lot-area ratios and heights will likely be the key to a successful proposal.

Development standards that may be appropriate for detached ADUs in single-family zones include:

- Maximum Lot Coverage
- Maximum Height
- Off-Street Parking
- Maximum Floor Area
- Maximum Floor-to-Lot-Area Ratio
- Maximum Height-to-Lot-Width Ratio
- Setbacks

Is there a minimum lot size that would be appropriate?

The smallest lot size among the Demonstration Program detached ADUs is 4,000 square feet in size (a 40- by 100-foot lot). This is a little smaller than the average lot size for typical single family lots in Seattle (4,500 - 5,000 square feet). There are many smaller lots in Seattle where a detached ADU could work.

The question is not so much whether a minimum lot size is appropriate—but more of whether:

- a) there is enough available land on the lot to build a detached ADU; or
- b) the height of the detached ADU is appropriate relative to the width of the lot.

These concepts can be administered through appropriate development standards such as maintaining the maximum lot coverage requirement (35%) . Tools such as a maximum floor-to-lot area ratio or a maximum height-to-lot width ratio can help ensure scale relationships that are successful.

Should additional height above that currently allowed for accessory structures be allowed, and if so, should there be a maximum limit for the additional height?

Results from the constructed detached ADUs have shown that allowing units above garages can work successfully. The tallest detached ADU in Magnolia is 24 feet, and this height works primarily due to the size and location of the lot, which is 8,400 square feet, on a corner, adjacent to an alley, and has a very wide planting strip. This project is also taller than the primary structure, but still works because its design and the space around it makes it "read" like just another home in the neighborhood.

The detached ADU above a garage in Green Lake is 22 feet tall from the alley to the top of the roof pitch, but rests on a slope and has a shorter height uphill. This project works even though the lot is narrower and smaller than the Magnolia example because its bulk and scale is appropriate for the size of lot, and because of its context—several other accessory structures, including “grandfathered” detached ADUs, line the alley.

Additional height above that currently allowed for accessory structures will be necessary to allow units above garages. A maximum height would help keep detached ADUs smaller relative to the height allowed by single family zoning. A maximum limit would help emphasize their accessory nature, and help ensure that they better fit in with their surroundings while limiting privacy impacts.

If additional height is allowed, should it be allowed outright or through the administrative Design Review procedure?

The administrative Design Review process, while proven successful through the Demonstration Program for projects of this size, has significant financial impacts for both the City as well as property owners that may wish to build detached ADUs above garages. Basic standards limiting the height, bulk, and scale of new detached ADUs will be an effective means of ensuring that new detached ADUs are a height appropriate to the size of the lot they are built on without needing to go through a lengthy and more expensive process.

Does the process through which it is approved make any difference in the amount of additional height that may be allowed?

Again, by limiting the height of detached ADUs according to the width of the lot they are built

on, DCLU can ensure that new structures are appropriate to the lot and their context.

Are ADUs above garages a viable option in terms of cost to construct and fit in single-family neighborhoods?

Two of the detached ADUs evaluated are above garages, both on alleys. Their construction costs were higher than the other detached ADUs evaluated, but their design and construction were both also contracted out to third parties, while the detached ADUs not above garages were owner -designed and built.

Detached ADUs above garages are more costly. They will work better in neighborhoods with alleys and on larger, wider lots, or lots that slope downward towards the alley, because they inherently lead to a taller building height.

What do the neighbors think of this type of housing?

The majority rated the impact of detached ADUs on the positive side, using a scale of 1 to 5. The primary concerns imparted both through the Demonstration Program selection process and the surveys sent out to neighbors were privacy, parking, and traffic. Other concerns heard include general overcrowding of neighborhoods, loss of open space, and quality of design.

What is the reaction of the residents of the detached ADU in terms of livability of the unit and how it could be improved?

Only two of the detached ADUs have had tenants since their construction; both of them have been occupied by the same tenants for the duration of their existence (over two years as of this writing.) One resident interviewed gave very strong support for the livability of his dwelling, while the other was described by the owner to appreciate the separated nature of the ADU.

Was administrative Design Review cost effective for this type of small project?

In most cases, Design Review was cost effective for the applicants of detached ADU projects selected through the Demonstration Program, although not all agreed.

As to whether administrative Design Review would be cost-effective for the City, a balance clearly must be struck between the fee that is charged, the time spent reviewing projects, and the development standards that can be departed from in a potential design review program for detached ADUs.

As stated above, certain concepts are more appropriate for flexible review than others. An administrative design review process would allow a discretionary review over certain elements of a new detached ADU, and would mean that these elements are neither optional nor that strict control of how the elements are used would be maintained by a reviewer.

Ultimately the balance of the benefits of administrative design review and the costs to the applicant must be weighed against a more detailed financial analysis.

If Design Review is to be used for this type of development, are additional design guidelines needed to address more directly the issues relevant to detached ADUs?

Yes. Design guidelines specific to detached ADUs that help shape their character would be necessary for an administrative Design Review program. They may also assist with other types of discretionary review. Design guidelines covering the following may be suitable:

- Setbacks
- Roof Pitch

- Materials, Colors, and Finishes Complementary to the Primary Structure
- Window Size and Placement
- Landscaping and Screening

Are there certain neighborhoods or types of neighborhoods that are more appropriate for this type of housing than others?

No. Although only four Demonstration Program detached ADUs have been constructed, they can be found across a variety of neighborhood types. All were found to be successful to varying degrees. An interesting note is that detached ADUs in more traditionally single family neighborhoods were better accepted than the one in an area with more of a rental and multifamily mix.

Different types of neighborhood will result in different types of detached ADUs. Where single family homes are larger and more expensive, more investment will likely be made to ensure that a new detached ADU complements and enhances existing investments. In neighborhoods with smaller, less expensive homes, smaller detached ADUs will be less expensive to construct, and the appropriate application of development standards and design guidelines can ensure that they complement the existing home and the neighborhood without being overburdensome.

While detached ADUs can be applied across different types of neighborhoods, there are certain types of lots that are more appropriate than others for detached ADUs. Larger lots, corner lots, and lots on alleys allow more physical space between detached ADUs and neighboring residences, and are places where new dwellings should be encouraged. Other, smaller lots have also been shown to work, as long as the size and height of the detached ADU is appropriate and it is designed well.

Demonstration Program Detached ADU Comparison Chart

	Magnolia	North Capitol Hill	Green Lake	Licton Springs
Lot Size	8,400 ft ²	4,000 ft ²	5,000 ft ²	5,125 ft ²
Lot Width	70 ft	40 ft	40 ft	50 ft
Lot Depth	120 ft	100 ft	125 ft	102.5 ft
Alley Width	28.5 ft	N/A	15 ft	N/A
Primary Structure Height	17.5 ft	27 ft	23 ft	21 ft
Detached ADU Pitch Height	24 ft	16 ft	22 ft	19 ft
Detached ADU Height/Lot Width Ratio	0.34	0.400	0.55	0.38
Detached ADU Base Height	11 ft	14 ft	17 ft	14 ft
Main Structure Footprint	2,353 ft ²	935 ft ²	1,294 ft ²	1,012 ft ²
Detached ADU Footprint	936 ft ²	466 ft ²	836 ft ²	374 ft ²
Total Lot Coverage	37%	35%	40%	27%
Detached ADU Approximate Gross Floor Area	1,872 ft ² (includes garage)	728 ft ²	1,336 ft ² (includes garages)	748 ft ²
Detached ADU FAR (approx.)	0.21	0.18	0.26	0.15
Detached ADU Minimum Side Yard Setback	9 ft to street	<1 ft	1 ft	4 ft
Detached ADU Minimum Rear Yard Setback	4 ft to alley	~1 ft	5 ft to alley	5 ft
Estimated Cost of Construction	\$200,000	\$95,000	\$152,484.70	\$138,800
Approx. Cost per ft² Floor Area	\$107/ft ²	\$130/ft ²	\$114/ft ²	\$186/ft ²
Land Use Permit Fees (includes Design Review)	\$3,593	\$1,470.50	\$3,394.50	\$1,952
Land Use Permit Fee/Est. Cost of Construction	1.8%	1.5%	2.2%	1.4%
Building Permit Fees	\$2,053.50	\$998	\$1,417.50	\$1,316.50
Building Permit Fees/Est. Cost of Construction	1%	1%	1%	1%